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# The National Historic Parks and Sites of Canada



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# The National Historic Parks and Sites of Canada

*(Revised December 1976)*

Prepared by Parks Canada under the authority of  
the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

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The national historic parks and sites of Canada commemorate the persons, places and events that have been declared of major significance in the development of Canada. They are operated by Parks Canada for the benefit and enjoyment of all Canadians.

## History

The passage of the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act in 1911 was a significant milestone in the Federal Government's commemorative program. Before this date, the Government's involvement was through financial contributions to memorial activities. This act created within the Department of the Interior a Dominion Parks Board to administer national and historic parks. In 1917, Fort Anne at Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, was transferred from the Department of the Militia and declared Canada's first national park of historic significance.

Upon the recommendation of the Commissioner of the Dominion Parks Board, the seven-member Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada was formed to advise the minister on the matter of sites of national historical interest. The Board met for the first time at Ottawa on October 28, 1919.

The second national historic park was established in 1927, and by 1950 there were nine such parks, visited annually by over 150,000 persons.

Until 1953, the Board operated under Order-in-Council authority, and no provision was made for Parliament's formal review of its decisions. The Historic Sites and Monuments Act of 1953 provided for the first time the statutory basis for the operation of the Board. The significant change brought about by this act was the definition of the role of the Board as adviser to the minister, whose statutory responsibility it became to develop and implement a national program of commemorating historic sites.

The intent of this act and the National Parks Act is the commemoration, preservation and restoration of sites and artifacts of national historic, prehistoric and scientific interest.

The Canadian Historic Sites Division, later renamed the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, was created in 1955 within the National and Historic Parks Branch of the Department of Northern



Affairs and National Resources to develop, interpret, operate and maintain historic parks and sites and to act as the Board's secretariat.

## **Policy**

In 1968, for the first time, a policy statement on national historic sites was tabled in the House of Commons by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on the recommendation of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Among other things, the statement elaborated the criteria for the designation of national historic sites for the benefit of Parliament and the public.

For commemoration, a site or structure must be closely associated with a person, place or event of national historic importance, must illustrate the cultural, social, political, economic or military patterns of history, a prehistoric people or an archaeological discovery, or must be valuable as an example of an architectural style.

The policy statement also included guidelines for the provision of visitor services, interpretative programs and the promotion of information for the public. Standards for the preservation, restoration and reconstruction of structures were established, stressing the authenticity of materials, furnishings and artifacts. The policy also recognized the need for a comprehensive plan to give full thematic and geographical representation and to establish a long-range program to facilitate the development of parks based on such themes as exploration and social, cultural, economic and prehistoric events.

## **Advisers**

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has 15 members — two representatives each from Ontario and Quebec, one from each of the eight other provinces, and one representative each from the National Museums of Canada, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Dominion Archivist (*ex officio*). An amendment to the Historic Sites and Monuments Act to include one representative from each of the territories was presented to Parliament in the autumn of 1976.

In advising the minister on the commemoration of places, persons and events of national historical importance, the Board may recommend that sites, buildings and other structures be developed as national historic parks or sites. Events may also be commemorated by



national historic plaques or, in exceptional circumstances, by distinctive monuments. Suggestions for the establishment of historic sites and parks come from many sources — the general public, Members of Parliament, historical societies and other groups, departmental staff and members of the Board itself.

Before a site is referred to the Board for consideration, a background paper is prepared. The Board then evaluates the significance of the site and makes its recommendation to the minister. If ministerial approval is granted, a development plan is prepared.

Land for historic parks and sites is acquired in various ways; normally it is transferred free of charge by the province in which it is located to the Federal Government, but under special circumstances the department itself acquires the land through purchase or private donation.

## **Administration**

The National Historic Sites Branch is part of the Parks Canada Program of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

Responsibility for the development and maintenance of new and existing parks has been decentralized and vested in five regional offices: Atlantic (Halifax), Quebec (Quebec City), Ontario (Cornwall), Prairie (Winnipeg) and West (Calgary).

The Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings is a major project of the National Historic Sites Branch. Begun in 1970, it is a computerized screening program to survey, analyse and categorize old buildings in Canada.

## **Parks and sites**

Across Canada more than 50 major national historic parks and sites are open to the public. In addition, some 700 plaques honour important persons, places and events in Canada's history.

Many of the historic sites commemorate military aspects of Canada's history. The fortress of Louisbourg on the coast of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, is Parks Canada's most ambitious reconstruction project. Louisbourg was built by the French between 1720 and 1745 to protect New France. In the latter year, it was captured by the British. A section of the town, with the massive



defences that surround it, is being reconstructed. The fortress is still under reconstruction, but many of the buildings are open to visitors and an interesting interpretative program is under way.

The St. Andrews Blockhouse and the Carleton Martello Tower in New Brunswick, Coteau du Lac in Quebec and Fort George and Queenston Heights in the Niagara area of Ontario all bring alive for visitors the battles of the War of 1812 and the manner of life of the soldiers who fought the Americans. Other Canadian national historic sites that remind visitors of the country's military past include the Citadel at Halifax, Signal Hill in Newfoundland (one of Canada's most popular historic sites), Artillery Park in Quebec City, Fort Wellington, Ontario, and Fort Rodd Hill near Victoria on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

For the most part, the national historic parks and sites in Western Canada commemorate the era of the fur trade. The best known of these sites is Lower Fort Garry near Winnipeg, Manitoba, where a stone fort, built by the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1830s, has been restored, complete with a fully-stocked fur loft, a blacksmith's shop, the governor's residence and two bastions.

Fort Prince of Wales, once known as the "preposterous fortress of the North", is the most northerly stone stronghold on the continent. Its construction by the Hudson's Bay Company was begun in 1733. The partially-restored fort is open to visitors who venture as far as Churchill. Other reminders of the fur trade include Fort Temiskamingue, Quebec, Fort St. Joseph, Ontario, and several other forts in Western Canada.

The role of the North West Mounted Police is commemorated by posts, such as those at Battleford and Fort Walsh, Saskatchewan, that were established during the late nineteenth century. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police patrol vessel *St. Roch*, the first ship to navigate the Northwest Passage in both directions, has been restored and is on display in Vancouver.

Canada's early history is illustrated by two Newfoundland sites. L'Anse aux Meadows, on the northernmost tip of the island, is the only authenticated Viking settlement in North America. Port au Choix, on the west coast, is the site of an Indian burial-ground of the Maritime Archaic period. Evidence obtained from the site indicates that the



Port au Choix area was used as a cemetery for almost 1,000 years, beginning well before 2,000 B.C.

Port Royal in Nova Scotia is the site of a habitation established in 1605 by Sieur de Monts and Samuel de Champlain and occupied by a French fur-trading colony. Port Royal was the first permanent settlement in Canada.

At Cartier-Brébeuf Park in Quebec City, a full-size copy of *La Grande Hermine*, the ship in which Jacques Cartier sailed to Canada in 1535, commemorates Cartier's wintering in the area in 1535-36. Also commemorated at this site are the activities of the Jesuit missionaries who lived there during the seventeenth century.

At Province House, Prince Edward Island, delegates from the British North American provinces met in 1864 to discuss proposals for a general union that led to Confederation in 1867.

The Alexander Graham Bell Complex, located near the inventor's summer home at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, honours the man known to the world as the inventor of the telephone. The complex illustrates Bell's work in other fields, such as communications, medical science, aeronautics and research into marine navigation.

Bellevue House in Kingston, Ontario, was the home of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, in 1848-49, when he was still a member of the Legislative Assembly.

Woodside National Historic Park has been restored to depict the family life of the young Canadian who later became Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Not to be overlooked is one of the most exciting periods of Canadian history: the Yukon gold rush of the late 1890s. The Klondike Gold Rush International Historic Park is a joint project of Canada and the United States. Visitors can follow the footsteps of the Yukon fortune-seekers along the Chilkoot Trail or they can ride the White Pass and Yukon Railway from Skagway to Whitehorse. In Dawson City, many of the buildings dating from the Klondike days are open to visitors.

## NOTES









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